

a fine **FACTA**



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Fine FACTA welcomes a new writer, John Ngo. Born and raised a Calgarian, John grew up as a huge Calgary Flames fan and developed a passion for both sports and writing. He majored in journalism at Mount Royal University, in Calgary, with the intention of pursuing a career as a sports journalist. While working at Shaw Communications to pay for his schooling, he found himself intrigued by the telecommunications industry. After obtaining his degree, John joined the corporate communications team at Shaw and is currently a communications advisor. He plays several sports, including hockey and badminton, in his spare time and is a big fan of feature films. He also enjoys travelling and hopes to visit Europe in the near future.

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MADD About Town

Editorial

Bonnie Cohoe



This issue of *Fine Facta* presents the stories of people who passionately dedicate their lives to sharing art and the creation of art.

Reg Knelsen taught my art students a lesson in which they excitedly shared stories and materials and were reaffirmed as capable artists. This illustrates John Ngo's story of Reg's enthusiastic and loving promotion of creating art among people who often do not see themselves as being able to create anything of value. Claire Macdonald's article on band camp inspired me to volunteer to go to junior high band camp for the first time, after sending my own children for many years without volunteering for their band camps. I learned how much energy, preparation and effort go into producing a successful and enjoyable band camp.

Natasha Joachim's story inspires us to look for what is missing, and dare to create it. Eileen Lee, like the other artists portrayed in this issue, passionately shares her enthusiasm for the arts—music, in her case—with as many people as possible. Katherine Deren uses her position as an administrator to promote arts to a wide audience.

Part 2 of the article by John Friesen and Virginia Lyons Friesen on art and native spirituality continues

their in-depth look at this relationship and gives us more reasons to reflect on the spiritual aspects of all our art. One example is the story about Aaron Sorensen and his film-making adventure. The success of Aaron's film seems to be due in part to making one person's spiritual quest real and personal to the audience. Aaron's story reminds us that we never know what we can succeed at until we try and that we should persevere in the face of resistance.

By the time this issue reaches you, the annual Fine Arts Council conference will be history. Now that I have participated in the planning committee for the annual conference, I realize how great a time commitment it is and I saw in person the joys and tears that flow from working with dedicated arts educators. I discovered that there are many people doing a wide variety of exciting things in the arts. There were many changes in the executive at the end of the conference, and I hope that teachers from across the province will volunteer to help the new executive promote arts education in Alberta.

We invite you to submit ideas and articles or feedback on what you read and see in *Fine Facta*. Let us know how you are involved in the arts in your area.

Arts-ful Features

The Shaman of the Studio

John Ngo

They call him the “shaman of the studio,” and he accepts it with a smile.

It’s not surprising that the clients at the Calgary Drop-In Centre (CDIC) have a great deal of respect for Reg Knelsen. He’s been facilitating the centre’s arts studio as a client volunteer for the past five years, providing opportunities for artists to unleash their creative side.

“It’s important to have a studio like this because everyone has a story, and everybody’s story is important,” he says.

But what also connects Knelsen with his students are his own life experiences, including an abusive childhood, addiction, mental illness and time spent living in homeless shelters all across Canada.

While Knelsen’s difficult past is something many at the CDIC can relate to, it’s his ability to successfully overcome it that has become an inspiration for all. It took a long time, but he finally realized that he was an artist.

Since that realization, Knelsen has committed to helping those who might not otherwise have an outlet to be creative. “It’s a sincere, honest platform,” he says. “It’s getting them to realize that their story is unique

and that whatever they have, nobody will ever hear or see it if they don’t express it.”

In his years at the CDIC art studio, Knelsen has seen art build confidence in his students, something that the students themselves didn’t know was possible. “Art creates value and that person starts to feel valuable,” he says. “It begins to light that spark and inspire them.”

The artists there have done so well that some of them have been able to sell their own pieces, an accomplishment that Knelsen is

clearly proud of. “Their faces light up when their artwork is bought,” he says. “They realize that someone actually thinks they produce something of value.”

Success often spurs people to create more pieces. “For about a month afterwards, they become production machines,” Knelsen says with a laugh. “We had one woman who sold a bookmark and now she’s got at least 200 bookmarks.”

What matters in the end though, he says, is the fact that art acts as a bridge to help people connect with each other and better their lives. “Art elevates us to a new plateau.” Many at the centre would likely agree with the shaman of the studio.



My First Band Camp

Claire Macdonald

Claire Macdonald is the fine arts learning leader and teaches drama at Willow Park Arts-Centred Learning, in Calgary. She has taught art, drama and humanities for 15 years, has been journalling with intent for more than 10 years and has taught many writing workshops. She is working on her master of arts in integrated studies at Athabasca University and has completed a course by Reinekke Lengelle entitled “Writing the Self.” She is a member of CARFAC and the treasurer of the Encore Junior High Drama Festival.

I have been teaching in the arts for 15 years and I finally had the chance to go to band camp. I had to borrow a sleeping bag, buy warm boots, and borrow a warm ski jacket, toque and mitts because my red leather gloves and high-heeled boots are not band camp worthy! I even had to go and buy flannel pyjamas—all I own is lingerie (not band camp acceptable!). For two days and one night with a group of 50 Grade 7s, three teachers and five parents, I became a teacher/chaperone with first aid certification.

The planning that goes into this undertaking is so much more than people realize. The amount of paperwork that has to be completed, collected and sorted, and all the meetings and the dotting of i’s and crossing of t’s, are enough to make many teachers forgo field trips. Fortunately, though, there are still an intrepid few who are willing to take on the challenge, because they know the benefits to their students. Our band teacher is one of those amazing unsung heroes who always goes that extra mile for her students, and the music they can produce is a testimony to her skill and caring.

So here I am on the bus, at an ungodly time of morning, clutching a coffee and sucking it back as though it were the elixir of life, hoping that I have

remembered to tell my substitute everything that he needs to know to replace me for two days. The amount of effort on my part to leave behind enough documentation so that I can be temporarily replaced is in itself remarkable: class lists, and lists of the students who will help and those who will act out and take advantage of the sub. Notes on where to supervise at lunch, and what to do with the spring play rehearsal after school. Oh, and did I mention that the leadership students will be collecting “Change for Change” containers for the Mustard Seed? Oh, nuts! Did I tell those students showing up to work on the mural that it can wait until next week when I am back? Did I tell my principal about the status-of-the-artist grant I am working on? Oh, shoot! I am on cleanup duty in the staff room and I forgot to arrange coverage for that. Oh, bother! I left the drama flats drying after my technical students painted them, and they will be in the way for my sub. Thank goodness I was able to get an experienced drama sub, who I know will be able to handle the work, and I know my students will actually keep learning even while I am here in the mountains chaperoning.

When we arrive at band camp we get the child labour—I mean, our enthusiastic students—to unload the bus, and so the camp begins. Watching my students in a completely different environment, as musicians, when I know them as drama divas, is very enlightening. My little nutbars—I mean, creative actors in drama class—are very different students when performing behind a tuba, clarinet or drums. Watching them rehearse, listening to the beautiful music they can make and seeing them ride horses, shoot arrows during the archery session and run in snowshoes, all the while laughing and making new friends, is delightful.

Arts-ful Features

Returning to eat, they share in chores and work as a team. This is why we do the paperwork we do. This experience will stay with them forever.

They will remember their first time on a horse—and my first time on horse. How I almost fell off Sassy as she trotted way too fast (I thought she was galloping) the wrong way and I ducked to miss being hit by a tree branch. Their parents would be amazed that their children volunteered to do the dishes for 60 people and actually fought over who got to vacuum the rooms. Trying to tuck in my 12 charges (*now* they're the drama queens I know) kept me up until 1 AM. Waking them up the next morning with the bugle playing reveille was quite satisfying. They made us laugh with their ingenious comments. While we were watching *Mamma Mia* and all singing along, just before a Meryl Streep song, one young girl piped up with perfect timing, "I feel a

song coming on!" and as we laughed, Meryl burst into song. Priceless.

Learning through the arts does not just happen. Learning through the arts does not happen just in a classroom. Teaching happens every day, but on trips like this the amount of learning—the authentic, lifelong, creative, interconnected life lessons that these students absorb—is phenomenal. This is why I still teach. This is why we all do the impossible paperwork that our school board expects of us—because it is worth it. We have changed the lives of these 50 students in ways they are not even aware of. We return them to their parents a little older and wiser, better musicians, students, friends and people—and exhausted. I return to my impossible teaching job invigorated, inspired by them and exhausted. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat! Bring on the paperwork! No, really!



A Passion for Drama

John Ngo

Drama teacher by day, actor by night, Natasha Joachim certainly doesn't live a dull life. For those that know her and how artistic she is, her path will come as no surprise. "I'm really blessed with having a very artistic family that's involved in television, multimedia, animation," Joachim says. "The arts have always been a part of my life."



It's this passion for the arts that led Joachim and three of her friends to form Ellipsis Tree Collective, the only Afrocentric theatre company in Western Canada. "It was created out of the need for more equal opportunity for people of colour as well as to expose audiences to stories they wouldn't normally hear," she says. "It's really important to reflect the cultural diversity that is Calgary, and we're really not honouring all voices by telling it from one particular perspective."

Recently, Joachim was able to take part in the play *Ruined*, a story focused on the plight of women in the

civil-war-torn Congo. "I was really proud to be part of a project like this, where we got to speak out about race as a weapon of war," she says.

Aside from acting, Joachim is also a drama teacher at St John's Fine Arts School, in Calgary—something she takes great pride in. "I've always been very passionate about children, especially the age group of the kids at the elementary level," she says. "I was able to create a niche that way and give back to a population that is underserved."

In what Joachim describes as a family atmosphere, St John's is where she is able to provide her students with a well-rounded program where they are completely immersed in the arts. "We're not just teaching through the arts—we're honouring the art forms of drama, dance, music and art," she says.

One of the lessons Joachim teaches is to find value in all aspects of drama and that there are no small parts, only small actors. She uses Robin Williams and Jim Carrey as examples of actors who take small parts, breathe life into them and steal the show because of how committed they are. "It really hits home with the kids when I give them these examples," she says. "I believe it to my core, so there isn't a need to convince them."

For Joachim, teaching drama is about working with the children, teaching them about themselves and how to express love. "I teach them to be proud and to own that—to explore the many facets of their personality," she says. "Drama is to do and to be—it's not about reading scripts."

It's these life lessons that prove to Joachim that this is exactly where she needs to be. "Becoming a teacher is the best choice I ever made."

Orchestrating Growth

John Ngo

For some children, learning a musical instrument can be quite a solitary experience. The Edmonton Youth Orchestra (EYO) can alleviate this solitariness.

“With EYO, suddenly a child finds that playing their chosen instrument in an ensemble or orchestra can really be fun, and this leads to firm friendships with other orchestra members,” says Eileen Lee, general manager of the EYO. “The discipline, dedication and perseverance instilled in these young musicians help prepare them for today’s competitive working environment in whichever career they enter.”

In giving young people (aged 11 to 24 years) with musical ability an opportunity to make music together and develop knowledge of the tradition of classical music, EYO also strives to create enjoyment and opportunities.

Regardless of economic circumstances, anyone who possesses the requisite skills is given the chance to benefit from their program. “No talented young person is ever denied the opportunity to perform in the orchestra through lack of funds,” Lee says. “Membership fees are waived, at the discretion of the board of

directors, to ensure that the EYO program is available to all young people who audition successfully.”

This dedication to youth has supported several talents over the years. Several alumni have successful solo careers, and approximately 20 former EYO members currently play in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Lee singles out Andrew Wan, an EYO alumnus,

who won the grand prize at the OSM Standard Life Competition in 2007 and is now a co-concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

Beginning with violin lessons at a young age, music has always been part of Lee’s life. When she was 18, she made the difficult decision to choose nursing over

violin performance studies, but her love of music and her interest in working with young musicians led to her appointment as EYO’s general manager in 1987. “There has been, and still is, a lot of music in our home,” Lee says. “I feel I have had the best of both my careers.”

Lee is proud of the organization’s impact on youth over the years. “I’ve met so many interesting young people and have watched many grow up during their years with EYO,” she says. “I’m so fortunate to work with such an amazing group of young people.”



Parlez-Vous Arts?

John Ngo

Raised in a family that has always embraced art, Katherine Deren grew up knowing that art would eventually play a large part in her life.

“I knew early as a student that I would go down this path,” says Deren. “I’ve always been involved in music, singing and drama, and my family has always been involved in the arts and singing, even as a family social activity.”

Nowadays, as curriculum manager for Alberta Education overseeing the French side, she is focused on creating opportunities for students to hone their skills and find their passion. This has been a challenge, because of limited resources for arts students, especially French resources. One of the first positive steps has been the implementation of technology in the classrooms, something that excites Deren, who points out that there are music teachers using Finale music notation software, art teachers using computers as design school, and drama teachers using cameras and film for special effects.

While the arts have mostly been communicated in traditional ways, technology has allowed students to quickly and easily share their works with the larger

community. “These days, there are so many possibilities to exchange and publish your work on the Internet,” Deren says. “You can talk and share with friends. You don’t have to jump through the same hoops other artists have had to in the past.”

As a teacher, she’s seen interest increase over the years. “Students are my biggest source of inspiration, with a lot of newcomers from countries like West Africa and Somalia, and from eastern Canada, like Montreal and New Brunswick,” Deren says. “There is a lot of creativity within them and they want to express it in different ways.”

For Deren, art is the perfect way for them to do so. “The arts are a vehicle for communication just as language is, and this is a really opportune moment for educators to share why the arts are important,” she says.

Currently, the provincewide conversation about how to transform the education system offers a huge opportunity to talk about the positive aspects of the arts and the place of the arts in education, she says. “The education minister has engaged Albertans through a website that contains blogs, forums to share ideas and online discussions,” Deren says. “There’s an inspiring action paper that I really encourage all educators to read.” To visit the website, go to <http://engage.education.alberta.ca>.



Aboriginal Art and Spirituality: A Neglected Link (Part 2)

John W Friesen and Virginia Lyons Friesen



Through many visits to Aboriginal communities, from Alberta and Saskatchewan to Texas (including 14 visits to the Native American southwest), researchers John W Friesen and Virginia Lyons Friesen have pursued their interest in Plains Indian and Métis history. Their special interests include art, education, Aboriginal spirituality and theology, and Aboriginal legends. Their scholarly repertoire includes teaching, conducting workshops and publishing. John Friesen is a professor in the Graduate Division of Educational Research and Virginia Lyons Friesen is an instructor in the Faculty of Communication and Culture, both at the University of Calgary.

In Part 1 of this article, published in the previous issue (10:1) of *A Fine FACTA*, the authors looked at the fundamentals of traditional Aboriginal spirituality and the integral role spirituality played in traditional Aboriginal art. They also examined how Aboriginal art has evolved through time and as the result of European contact, and noted the need to resolve the conflict between the world view of dominant society and that of Aboriginal cultures.

Religion and Aboriginal Spirituality

Part of the conflict between the world view of the Aboriginal peoples and that of the dominant society lies in the differences between Aboriginal spirituality and religion, and the way that Aboriginal spirituality has been misunderstood and unappreciated as a valuable world view.

In the tumultuous decade of the 1960s, many protesting groups defied all forms of social structure, including organized religion. However, more recently it has become quite appropriate to discuss religious and spiritual matters, both because of a change in social perception and because religious beliefs are so often related to topics in the world news. Political unrest is often connected to religious fanaticism of one kind or another, and we are therefore hearing more references to other belief systems. Unfortunately, though, deeper knowledge of those belief systems is not often pursued.

A similar situation prevails with regard to Aboriginal faith perspectives. Historically, Euro-Canadians saw alternative belief systems as heathen simply because they were not Christian. There was no middle ground; people were either Christian or heathen, and the

heathen had to be saved. This ingrained and narrow perspective made it difficult for the European newcomers to appreciate the intricacies of Aboriginal metaphysics and other aspects of the culture.

Although some scholars still use the word *religion* when discussing traditional Aboriginal spirituality, it is fundamentally inaccurate to describe Aboriginal belief systems as religious in the modern sense. The word *spiritual* is much more appropriate. Scholars have documented significant cultural differences between the various North American Aboriginal peoples at the time of European contact. However, their metaphysical systems did have a common feature: for them, spirituality was all-pervading. Their daily spiritual activities absorbed all aspects of their lifestyle, including arts and crafts. Spirituality was not a part-time occupation or a Sunday obligation; they spent much time daily in spiritual activities. As Santee Sioux elder Charles Eastman (Ohiyesa) (1980, 17) puts it, “In the life of the Indian there was only one inevitable duty—the duty of prayer—the daily recognition of the Unseen and Eternal. His daily devotions were more necessary to him than daily food.” The threads of ordinary life and spirituality were so tightly interwoven that the sacred and the secular were indistinguishable (Zimmerman and Molyneaux 1996, 767).

Aboriginal peoples have always understood spirituality as an effort to participate in the mystic; the search represents a need to deal with the grand existential and metaphysical questions we must all face (Rushing 1999, 170). Harrod (1995) emphasizes that spiritual beliefs (although he unfortunately uses the term *religion*) have always been central to the Aboriginal way of life:

Religion was an essential ingredient in the creation and maintenance of the social identities of all these peoples, and religious energies were foundational in the construction of new social relations as they responded to either improved or chosen alterations in their environment. (p 30)

Tatanga Mani (Walking Buffalo), of the Stoney tribe (Nakoda First Nation), stated, “We saw the Great Spirit’s work in almost everything: sun, moon, trees, wind, and mountains. Sometimes we would approach the Great Spirit through these things” (Kaltreider 1998, 138).

Formalized religion, by contrast, can generally be dichotomized, broken down, analyzed and separated into parts, and it may be differentiated from other life



Arts-ful Features

concerns. Current Canadian forms of religion may be described as “fulfilling a separate, innate category of the human consciousness that issues certain insights and indisputable certainties, about a Superhuman Presence” (Runes 1967). In North America today, we think of a religious person as one who believes in the existence of a superior being (traditionally called God), and the way to connect with that being is through recipes or formulas dictated by an organized religious form. To be religious is to be committed to and act in accordance with a code of ethics derived from outside sources considered greater than oneself. The code may not necessarily incorporate a personalized theism (that is, belief in Almighty God, *per se*). Melford Spiro defined religion as consisting of some form of organized or patterned social behaviour, wherein religious adherents respond, in both daily activities and specific rituals, to the perceived will of some entity that is seen as having greater power than themselves (Banton 1966). Thus, religion becomes a series of beliefs by means of which individuals represent the society of which they are members and the relationships, obscure but intimate, that they have with it (O’Toole 1984).

A schematic of three components can be used to analyze religious systems: (1) beliefs that inspire fear, awe or reverence; (2) a prescribed or implied list of expected behaviours; and (3) a long-term promise of eventual respite perpetuated by hope (Hewitt 1993; Friesen 1995). Those raised in an environment with an explicit religious bent may contend that the attending code posits implicit mandatory expectations for the individual, and even for society as a whole.

In contrast, an orientation without theistic implications would hold that the cosmos is a given and that its origins, cycles and mandates are not questioned because they are perceived as perpetual. They are because they are. However, there is an implied obligation on the part of the human race to care for the earth, to keep its air and waters pure, and to reprimand anyone who violates this code.

The original peoples of North America had definitive beliefs about the universe and their role within it, but those beliefs were rarely formally articulated or mandated as individual obligations. The universe, the earth and all natural resources were perceived as gifts from the Creator. It was assumed that the recipients would be appreciative of these gifts and that they would express their appreciation in various forms of ceremonial life.

However, the expectations of appreciation were not explicitly spelled out, and no form of institutional membership was required (as one might expect in a Baha’i, Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh organization).

As discussed in Part 1 of this article, the First Peoples built their cultures on a foundation of reverence for the universe and for all living things. They did not differentiate between material objects and non-material phenomena, or between humans and animals. There was a holistic perspective, which meant that every living thing was connected to every other living thing, whether human, animal, bird, fish or plant. The universe was viewed as a complex unity, made up of variety and diversity, but constituting a synthesized whole. The implied obligation of humankind, therefore, was to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature and to respect its balance.

The First Peoples focused on remaining spiritually in tune with the universe. In their spiritual quest, activity was viewed as a means to an end, indeed a spiritual end. Being, not doing, was perceived as the higher virtue.

Looking after family and community members was highly valued. Any band member—or, for that matter, anyone even remotely related (usually by kinship) to a person with resources—would have their needs attended to. Anyone with resources to share was expected to do so; it was never appropriate or necessary for anyone to have to beg for help. These expectations were even more firmly cemented in tribes that featured clan systems. The idea expressed in the Bible as “It is more blessed to give than to receive” was core to the Aboriginal faith.¹

Religion is often concerned with final events—the destinies of individuals and the final state of the universe. Eschatology, the division of metaphysics that deals with final events, considers questions such as, What happens when people die? Is there life after death? What should individuals do to prepare for life in the hereafter (if there is one)? and, What will be the future state of the universe? There are no scientifically supportable answers to these questions, of course, but that has never stopped theologians and philosophers from speculating. Some have even dared to elaborate on their suppositions in volumes of print.

Traditionally, the Aboriginal peoples of North America were hardly practising eschatologists. Rather, they valued the “perennial now” (Couture 1991). Adherence to the oral tradition also precluded

eschatology, because life was viewed as a phenomenon of the here and now. Life was to be lived with a perpetual appreciation of the present. That appreciation could be demonstrated in any and all forms of individual action. As Eastman (1980, 149) puts it,

The attitude of the Indian toward death, the test and background of life, is entirely consistent with his character and philosophy. Death has no terror for him; he meets it with simplicity and perfect calm, seeking only an honorable end as his last gift to his family and descendants.

Aboriginal shamans did not delineate a difference in kind between the spirit world of their existence and any possible future state. They perceived the human world as permeated by spirit beings who entered and left the human domain. Traditional Aboriginal philosophy did not differentiate between human and animal spirits but, rather, assumed that every living thing possessed spirit as an animating and personifying principle (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 24).

If the spirit world of the Aboriginal peoples could be separated from Immanuel Kant's perceived phenomenological realm, there have always been non-Aboriginal people willing to try to make contact with it through various means. The Aboriginal peoples believed in an afterlife domain of the spirits, but procedures for making contact with that world were not spelled out, except perhaps for such rituals as the vision quest celebrated by the Plains Indians. That there was a future state was never in dispute, but its precise specifications were neither speculated about nor elaborated upon. What mattered was how individuals lived their daily lives in response to the design the Creator had designated for them. They were expected to live life purposefully and to understand life and its learning opportunities as a way to become complete (Cajete 1994, 148). This expectation included the world of art.

Traditional Aboriginal spirituality and metaphysics are often misunderstood. Religiously inclined people tend to think that the expressions of spirituality are less valid than those of their own religious affiliation. This happens partly because those who are religiously influenced are not usually trained to investigate alternative ways of thinking or believing. They have probably been taught that spirituality implies belief in spirits (pantheism) rather than monotheism. The notion of spiritualism has not fared well in organized religious

circles because of its emphasis on the role of the medium, who allegedly serves as the contact between the seen and the unseen worlds. Aboriginal spirituality was for several centuries classified as a form of spiritualism because of its inherent belief that people could receive messages or learn lessons from any living entity. The primary difference between today's forms of spirituality and traditional Aboriginal spirituality is that the latter does not mandate mediation; however, mediation can happen as a supplementary source of inspiration.

Aboriginal Spirituality: Implications for Modern Life and Art

Having been so long bypassed as a legitimate way of believing, traditional Aboriginal spirituality offers a great deal of intrigue. The current openness to appreciating the wider parameters of both spirituality and art is encouraging. Students of Aboriginal culture and spirituality are realizing that the propensity of First Peoples, past and present, to link spirituality to every human activity could have positive implications for modern life. The increased interest in spirituality is most fortuitous, because it would be very limiting to ignore the study of promising alternative belief systems. If the Aboriginal world view had been explored and appreciated more a few centuries ago, the realms of philosophy and art would be richer for it. However, it might not be too late to make up for this deficiency.

Not every philosopher, academic or even art critic would agree that our society could benefit from incorporating elements of a traditional Aboriginal world view. Nor would they necessarily be convinced of the merits of its hidden meanings or its degree of sophistication. It would be easier to dismiss the Aboriginal world view as belonging to an earlier, more primitive stage in the evolution of civilization. Dissanayake (1990, 92, 95), for example, raises doubts about the claims of people who intimate that their personal actions may be influenced by a divine connection (shamans, for example). No doubt she would have the company of academics who refuse to accept the premise that otherworldly beliefs mandate sacred obligations.

However, assuming a more positive stance toward traditional Aboriginal spirituality holds promise for furthering pedagogical excellence through better, fuller understanding. First, serious study of Aboriginal beliefs (or any alternative world view) can open up new vistas of learning and offer expansive ideas for consideration. Second, Aboriginal thought is uniquely focused on spirituality, which heretofore has not played a significant role in the scientific community. Perhaps this so-called objective attitude needs to be changed and, like true scientists, we ought to consider every possible resource in learning about, analyzing and perhaps resolving global issues.

For example, for traditional Aboriginal peoples, prayer was a vital component of spirituality. Today, prayer is making a comeback. Larry Dossey (1997a, 1997b), a proponent of the need to explore the spiritual domain, is a medical doctor who gave up practising medicine in order to study prayer. Overwhelmed by the hundreds of studies proving the efficacy of prayer in hospital settings, Dossey quickly discovered that the medical community was reluctant to buy into the benefits of prayer for at least a dozen reasons, including the following: (1) the notion that spiritual healing is often equated with mysticism, (2) the belief that healing power is possessed only by those who are strange or different, (3) the lack of replicability, and (4) the fact that the laws of healing appear to be different from those of other sciences (Dossey 1997a, 278). Now may be the time to re-evaluate the rather slipshod way in which spirituality has been dismissed as a legitimate avenue of research.

Perhaps John Collier, the US commissioner of Indian affairs from 1933 to 1945, was correct when he urged a reconsideration of the traditional Aboriginal world view, particularly their respect for the earth—indeed, the universe—and its spiritual workings. As Collier observed, “They had what the world has lost. They have it now. What the world has lost the world must have again, lest it die” (Collier 1947).

For the Aboriginal peoples of the past, art was one avenue by which to express earth respect. That belief still exists today, in modified form. To ignore this unique world view is to neglect a significant component in the search for academic, scientific and pedagogical excellence.

Note

1. Acts 20:35b (KJV)

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Road Trips and Red Carpets

John Ngo

In Aaron Sorensen's world, Hank Williams beats Will Smith every time.

The director from Dicksonville, Alberta, never thought he'd become a filmmaker, let alone create a film that has become critically acclaimed in North America. In fact, Sorensen was always a musician and never dabbled in the world of theatre.

"I was sitting on campus one day at the University of Alberta, making a list of things I'm good at," says Sorensen. "At the bottom, I drew a line and at a whim, it struck me—maybe I should make a movie."



And just like that, he went out and did.

After spending several years in the town of Wabasca, Alberta, Sorensen met several members from the Cree community and found it interesting that many of them, particularly the men, knew songs by Hank Williams quite well. "It was intriguing that Hank Williams, this old cowboy, had such an impact on the First Nations people," Sorensen says. "Some of them could play his songs better than he could!"

With that in mind, Sorensen set out to put together a script and find a cast and crew. He shot his first film, *Hank Williams First Nation*, and edited it himself in late 2004. "The film is about a man who is a big Hank Williams fan, is reading the tabloids and gets it in his head that his hero is still alive," Sorensen says. "He decides that before he dies, he's going to make the trip from his reserve to Tennessee to find out more about Hank Williams."

The movie, however, isn't so much about the main character himself, Sorensen says. "It's a road trip movie told through the eyes of those who stayed at home," he explains.

After not being able to find a Canadian distributor, Sorensen and his team decided to release it on two screens in the towns of Manning and Peace River. "We went all out, got a red carpet, served sparkling apple cider in the lobby and had complimentary moose kabobs," he says. "It was a Hollywood premiere, Peace River style".

That night, *Hank Williams First Nation* opened against Will Smith in the 2005 film *Hitch*. Sorensen got a call from the people at Nielsen ratings afterwards. “Will Smith did \$64, we did \$3,700,” Sorensen reminisces with a laugh.

Sorensen and his team went from town to town, setting records wherever they went. By the end of the year, *Hank Williams First Nation* turned out to be the second-highest-grossing Canadian film in 2005, winning several awards along the way.

But perhaps most rewarding of all was the feedback he received. “I remember one evening in High Prairie, where we played to a packed house, and one old Cree woman came over and gave me a bone-crushing hug,” Sorensen recalls. “She said it was so nice to see them on the screen. We received such a powerful reaction and in part it’s that we did a good job, but also that we so seldom, in Canada, get to see ourselves on the big screen in a genuine way.”

And just like that, for at least a moment, a humble filmmaker became our very local celebrity.

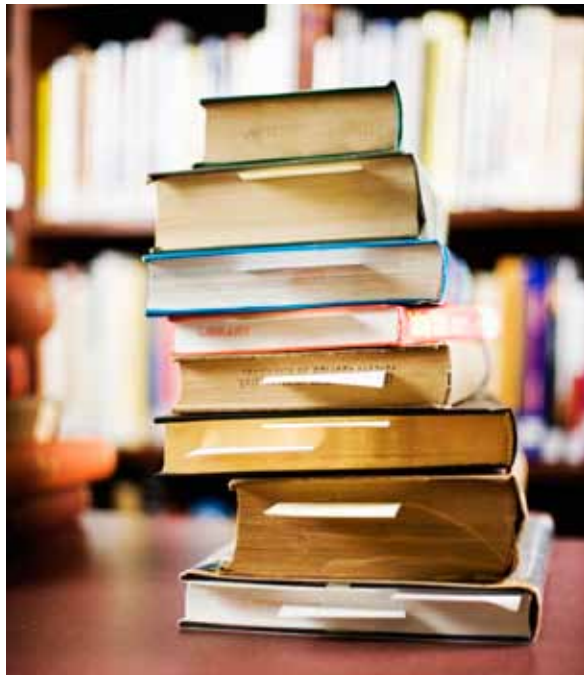
Resources

New Books in the ATA Library

Sandra Anderson, ATA librarian, advises that the following books are now available from the ATA Library:

- *The Music Teaching Artist's Bible: Becoming a Virtuoso Educator*, by Eric Booth (2009)
- *Teaching General Music in Grades 4–8: A Musicianship Approach*, by Thomas A Regelski (2004)
- *Sound Advice: Becoming a Better Children's Choir Conductor*, by Jean Ashworth Bartle (2003)
- *Kodály Today: A Cognitive Approach to Elementary Music Education*, by Micheál Houlihan and Philip Tacka (2008)

More titles have been ordered. For information about borrowing one of these (or any other) books from the ATA Library, go to www.teachers.ab.ca and select For Members from the banner at the top, select Programs and Services, select ATA Library and then Library Services.

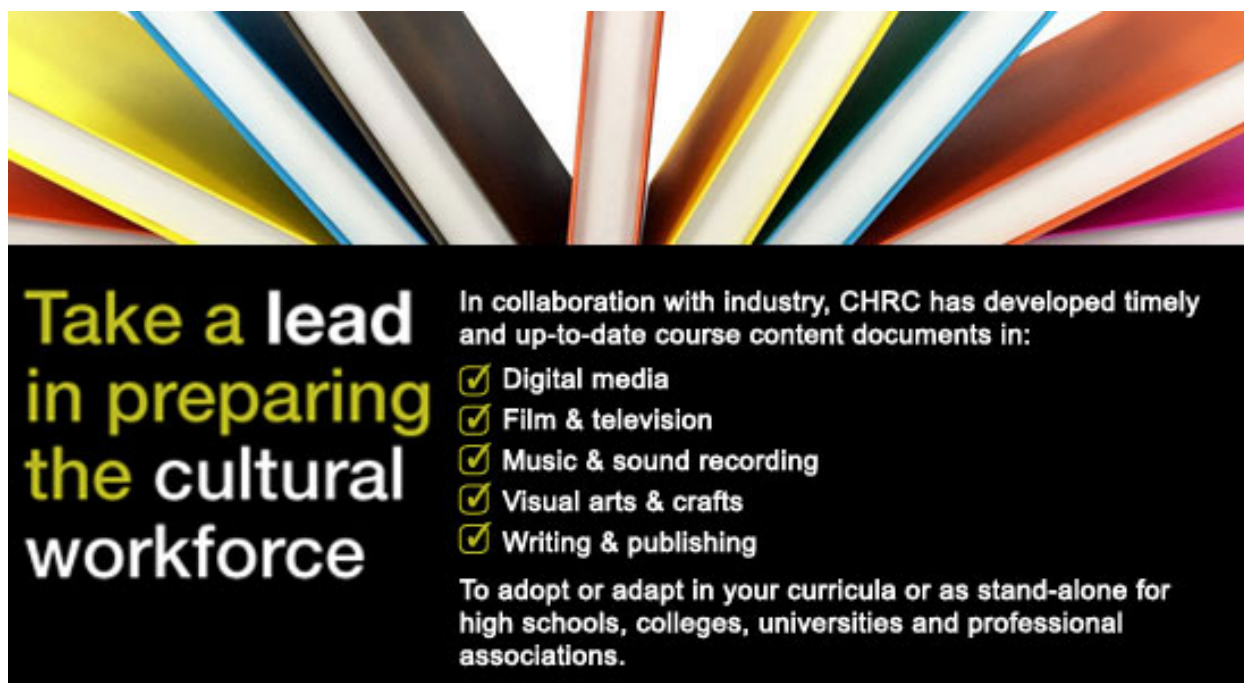


Artist as Entrepreneur

A*rtist as Entrepreneur* is a Grade 11 college preparation course created by teachers for teachers. The course is specifically designed for high school students who want to pursue a career in the arts, and focuses on ways in which entrepreneurs recognize opportunities, generate ideas, and organize resources to plan successful ventures that enable them to achieve their goals. The document is divided into four sections:

- Enterprising People and Entrepreneurs
- Ideas and Opportunities for New Ventures
- Benefits of a Venture Plan
- Completing a Venture Plan

The material was produced by the Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC), a federal sector council. For more information about *Artist as Entrepreneur*, go to www.culturalhrc.ca/courses/artist-as-entrepreneur-e.asp. For more information about CHRC, visit www.culturalhrc.ca.



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Add the goal of being published to your teacher professional growth plan and submit something to *A Fine FACTA*! Submissions may include the following:

- Practical classroom tips, lesson plans and rubrics
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- Stories and poems by teachers, students and student teachers
- Student artwork

Please include a short (three- to five-sentence) biography and your address so that a copy of the issue in which your work appears can be sent to you.

Submit signed permission forms for student work or photographs of students.

Send submissions to Bonnie Cohoe, 24 Signature Place SW, Calgary, AB T3H 3A1; e-mail b.cohoe@calgarywaldorf.org.

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Your child has submitted a piece of work or appears in a photograph that we would like to print in the next issue of *A Fine FACTA*. *A Fine FACTA* is a journal that goes to teachers across Alberta who are members of the Fine Arts Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

By signing below, I give permission for my child's work or photograph to be considered for publication in an upcoming issue of *A Fine FACTA*. This permission form will be forwarded to the journal editor.

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Notes to teachers:

- When submitting student work, please include the Permission to Print form with all signatures completed. Send the student work/photograph and the permission form to the editor of *A Fine FACTA*, Bonnie Cohoe, 24 Signature Place SW, Calgary, AB T3H 3A1; e-mail b.cohoe@calgarywaldorf.org.
- Work may be submitted electronically to b.cohoe@calgarywaldorf.org. Please ensure that the permission form is mailed to the address above.

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